FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

AND

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

ABIQUIU AND JEMEZ CANYON RESERVOIRS SUPPLEMENTAL WATER STORAGE AND RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
ALBUQUERQUE DISTRICT
4101 Jefferson Plaza Northeast
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87109

April 2001

ABIQUIU AND JEMEZ CANYON RESERVOIRS
SUPPLEMENTAL WATER STORAGE AND RELEASE
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) Albuquerque District, operates Abiquiu Dam on the Rio Chama, for flood control, sediment retention, water supply, and recreation under authority of the Flood Control Acts of 1948 and 1950. Under current operating procedures, normal flows and releases from El Vado Reservoir upstream are passed through Abiquiu Reservoir with little if any regulation. The Jemez Canyon Dam and Reservoir Project was authorized by the Flood Control Acts of 1948 and 1950, for flood damage reduction and sediment retention. Construction of the dam began in May, 1950, and the facility was completed and placed into operation in October 1953. All lands associated with the project are held in trust by the United States for the benefit and use of the Pueblo of Santa Ana.

In a continuation of efforts for the conservation of the Rio Grande silvery minnow (minnow), the State of New Mexico submitted a " settlement proposal" to the Department of Justice, which proposed the creation of a "Conservation Pool" in the Corps' Middle Rio Grande reservoirs for endangered species purposes. Since it will take some time for all parties to reach agreement on the provisions of a settlement, and since spring runoff has already begun, the federal agency representatives and the State of New Mexico drafted an interim agreement to allow the Corps to begin storing water. This interim agreement is the Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Endangered Species Conservation Pool (MOU). New Mexico proposes to create the conservation pool storing during 2001 through 2003 native Rio Grande water that otherwise would have flowed downstream to Elephant Butte Reservoir and contributed to New Mexico's Rio Grande Compact delivery. This Conservation Pool would be used to provide a limited amount of flow in the Rio Grande for the benefit of the minnow.

This Conservation Pool will remain under the control of the State of New Mexico, until it is made available for use by the United States pursuant to a long-term agreement arising from further collaboration. In the event that no long-term agreement is reached, the United States agrees that it will release all or a portion of the Conservation Pool to the Rio Grande at times and in quantities specified by the State of New Mexico and pursuant to applicable laws and regulations. Reclamation will perform the hydrologic accounting for all reservoir operations.

Pursuant to the responsibilities of federal agencies under Section 7(a)(1) of the Endangered Species Act, and consistent with the Corps authorities, the Corps has provided for the temporary storage at Jemez Canyon and Abiquiu Reservoirs. The proposed federal action evaluated in this Environmental Assessment entails the temporary storage of the aforementioned native water in Corps reservoirs and its subsequent release for the benefit of the Rio Grande silvery minnow. Non-emergency deviations to the existing water control plan at Corps reservoirs require approval by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, South Pacific Division. Pursuant to Engineer Regulation 1110-2-240, *Water Control Management*, deviations in the approved water control plans require compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and all other appropriate laws and regulations. Under the terms of the Rio Grande Compact, concurrence of Compact commissioners from Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas has been secured for the proposed action.

If no action is taken rather than pursuing the proposed action, the storage of native Rio Grande water and delivery from an established conservation pool in Abiquiu and Jemez Canyon Reservoirs at a later date to benefit the Rio Grande silvery minnow would not occur. The Corps reservoirs would be operated to pass inflow up to channel capacity. The peak discharges forecast

from Jemez Canyon and Abiquiu Dams would be approximately 1,000 and 1,800 cfs, respectively. Forecasted summer flows below Isleta and San Acacia Diversions could reach zero cfs resulting in the potential for river drying during summer high demand periods.

Reduction of flows in the Rio Chama from the beginning of storage in Abiquiu Reservoir through the end of June will result in a planned average discharge of 150 to 200 cfs throughout that period. This will effectively eliminate the spring snow-melt run-off peak on the Rio Chama below Abiquiu Dam. This could impact spawning activities of native species. Reductions in peak flows during storage will have a negative impact but the benefit to the minnow of using this water later to supplement low summer flows outweighs this negative effect.

The action would be implemented to insure the flood control function of all projects, insure normal water deliveries, protect the storage of San-Juan Chama water, and insure that fish and wildlife resources and associated recreational opportunities in Abiquiu and downstream river areas are preserved. The action can be accomplished within the guidelines previously discussed, without major adverse effects to ecological systems, cultural resources, or socioeconomic concerns.

The planned action has been fully coordinated with Federal and State agencies with jurisdiction over the biological, cultural, and hydrological resources of the project area. After informal consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, the Corps and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have jointly concluded the planned action is not likely to adversely effect the Rio Grande silvery minnow, southwestern willow flycatcher, and bald eagle, and will have no effect on interior least tern or whooping crane. Based on the analysis reported in the Environmental Assessment, the planned action would have no significant negative effects on the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared for this action for supplemental water storage and release from Abiquiu and Jemez Canyon Reservoirs.

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Raymond G. Midkiff
Lieutenant Colonel, EN
District Engineer

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13 April 2001

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Deputy Commander

for Raymond G. Midkiff
Lieutenant Colonel, EN
District Engineer